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Women Speak Out in a Nuclear World

The Majority That's No Longer Silent

By BEVERLY BEYETTE, *Times Staff Writer*

"We sit here," the speaker said, "30 minutes away from some missile in the middle of Siberia—targeted on Los Angeles, I'm sure."

It was not a frame from "Dr. Strangelove, Part II." It was the first Los Angeles Women's Conference on National Security. And the speaker, William E. Colby, director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 1973 to 1976, was addressing the question: "Can We Trust the Russians?"

Boosting Participation

The conference Friday and Saturday at UCLA was a 12-hour, $40 crash course in Soviet-American relations, arms control strategies, the pros and cons of "Star Wars," the economics of defense and the specter of nuclear proliferation.

The stated objective of the sponsoring Committee for National Security, a Washington-based private nonpartisan, nonprofit group, was "to educate a broad spectrum of women about national security issues and to encourage them to participate knowledgeably in . . . decision-making processes."

CNS director Anne Cahn is on record as favoring "a mutual moratorium on the further testing of nuclear weapons" and it appeared that many at this regional forum, which had its peak attendance of 250 at Friday's opening session, were in sympathy with a freeze philosophy.

Why a women's conference on national security? One reason, Cahn said, is that it is an area of policy-making from which women have traditionally been excluded. Another is the special viewpoint that women bring to debate on the issue—for example, re-examining national security in the context of how arms buildup affects social and economic conditions.

It was a somewhat fragmented forum, offering a glut, or what one speaker referred to as a "cumulative overlap," of statistics on guns and butter, megatonnage potential of state-of-the-art nuclear warheads, the Gorbachev mind-set and prospects for the arms control negotiations under way in Geneva.

(It is significant, perhaps, that the principal conference speakers were men and that only one person, a questioner in the audience, mentioned that none of the U.S. negotiators at the table in Geneva are women.)

When the last speech had been presented, Lynn Greenberg of the Thursday Night Group, a Santa Monica-based nuclear education organization, told conferees, most of them women, "This is your chance to stop listening to experts and to become one yourself." Her appeal for ideas for constructive action brought responses ranging from a women's mission to Moscow to talk with Russian women, to formation of study groups on Russian history, culture and politics.

'Scared . . . or Relieved'

But, bombarded with conflicting information, many of the women seemed to be thinking what Ruth-Ann Mead of Brentwood, a bookkeeper for a television production company, later expressed: "I don't know who to believe on what subject. . . . I don't know whether to be more scared or more relieved."

A prevailing theme was the importance of citizen participation in decision-making. It is vital, said Cahn, that the collective wisdom be "the rudder" of U.S. policy.

Cahn poured a single pebble from a tennis ball can into a saucepan, explaining that the ping represented the total megatonnage of all bombs dropped during World War II. Then, pouring a canful of pebbles into the pan with a great clatter, she said that is what is available today.

Said Cahn: "We, you and I, have to ask what is it all about? What is it all for? We have tolerated and endured. Now we need to confront and to change."

Keynoter Paul C. Warnke, chairman of the Committee for National Security, former director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and in 1977-78 chief U.S. negotiator at the SALT arms control talks, said:

"I don't believe that (citizen input) is either a sign of weakness . . . nor is it necessarily a formula for anarchy. I think instead that informed public debate, public participation in policy-making, creates more coherence. It tends to blunt the extremes."

Warnke emphasized that he was not suggesting that the public take part in the day-to-day, nuts-and-bolts decisions, explaining, "I don't think (for example) that most Americans really feel that they have the information to determine whether or not we ought to stay in UNESCO. I think most Americans couldn't tell UNESCO from UNICEF or Uniroyal or Unisex."

Issues of Survival

But, Warnke said, "The issues that should engage public attention are the key issues of the use of U.S. military force and the question of strategic arms policy. These are basically the issues that have to do with peace, with survival."

Warnke added: "The sorry history of the MX (missile) certainly provides no confidence that we can rely on the expert judgment of those who from time to time are in the positions of power."

The "Star Wars" (Strategic Defense Initiative) debate did not have, as had been promised by moderator Dan Caldwell of Pepperdine University, the pyrotechnic punch of the film, but it was not without its moments.

Thomas Etzold, assistant director for multilateral affairs in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and, as he pointed out, the only political-level representative of the Reagan Administration among the speakers, called the "Star Wars" controversy "a mixture of good physics and ill will . . . of extraordinary proportions."

In the long run, Etzold said, "I think the President's Strategic Defense Initiative is going to seem conservative, in the most proper sense," in that it conserves deterrence as a basis for security and emphasizes increased reliance on defense and decreased reliance on nuclear offense.

At the very least, he added, the proposal provided the impetus for the Soviets to return to negotiations on real reductions in both strategic- and intermediate-range

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nuclear forces and on that basis alone is "an auspicious step in the quest for a safer world."

Robert Bowman, now president of the Institute for Space and Security Studies in Bethesda, Md., and director of advanced space programs for the Air Force from 1976 to 1978, said the "Star Wars" system would be a "sitting duck" in space, easily "eliminated at any time of Soviet choosing, probably just before they launch an attack."

Another Soviet alternative, Bowman said, would be to simply avoid the defense system—"You can always go around a Maginot line in the sky" by sending ballistic missiles on low trajectories, launching them from submarines near the coast or "floating them up the Potomac or the East River or into San Diego Bay or San Pedro Harbor on a barge or a sailboat."

In summary, he said, " 'Star Wars' is far, far more than is required to enhance deterrence and far less than is required to do away with it. 'Star Wars' is far more than is required to protect offensive missiles but far, far less than is required to protect people."

Paul S. Brown, a physicist who is assistant associate director for arms control at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, asked, "Can we achieve the leak-proof umbrella the President seeks? I don't think anybody knows." But, he added, few scientists believe it possible.

"Imagine," Brown said, "if only 1% of the tens of thousands of Soviet warheads were to leak through such a defense—it would be an unprecedented disaster. Our largest cities would be destroyed and many millions would die."

He noted that the Soviets have been actively pursuing research and development on their own defense system and "the main difference between us and the Soviets is that our President gave a speech about it and theirs did not."

Early on, Thomas Etzold expressed his annoyance at some of the rhetoric. Noting that "people are being asked to consider whether or not their judgment might be superior to whatever expertise might be brought to the problems," he said, "There is no conflict here. Expertise has its place and judgments have their place. Let us only be careful that we understand which is which."

Etzold said he spoke for the President when he said "everybody here today is committed to deep reductions in nuclear weapons."

But, he said, he considers the nuclear freeze "a reactionary idea at a time when we and the Soviets have both agreed at the highest levels that it is time to get some real reductions and when we are in Geneva trying to do exactly that."

The Administration, he said, thinks a "build-down," or systematic replacement of older nuclear weapons with smaller numbers of newer ones, is preferable to a freeze or a test ban, and gets around the problem of verification.

If the goal was to encourage women to debate the issues, the speakers provided some provocative starting points for dialogue.

Sheila Tobias, visiting professor of political science at USC and UCSD, on what she perceives as the guns-rather-than-butter priority of the Reagan Administration: "An F-14 fighter plane, of which the United States has 512, costs $50 million. Ask why we can't live with 511 . . . and one child abuse program."

Gorbachev's Incentive

Paul Warnke, on prospects for peace with Mikhail Gorbachev as Soviet leader: "We have a man in charge who realizes that he is going to have something like 20 years and that 10, 15 years from now he'll be living in a world that he very much helped make, or he'll be living in no world at all."

Arnold Horelick, director, Rand/UCLA Center for the Study of Soviet International Behavior: "By almost every measure . . . the trends are now beginning to turn against the Soviet Union." But, he cautioned, "The position of the Soviet Union is difficult but it is not desperate" and "the lesson of the '70s (and an America then in disarray) is don't kick a superpower when he's down."

Former CIA Director Colby spoke of the "two faces" of the Soviet Union—that of superpower and oil and steel giant, the "evil empire" that is homeland of political movements in many countries and, by contrast, a society beset by a stagnant economy, widespread alcoholism and labor problems.

Can we trust the Russians? "Yes, we can," said Colby, "and, secondly, we don't have to. We can watch them." He added, "We have not had a strategic surprise since Sputnik." As for trust, he said, "We can trust the Russians to do what's in their interests" and they are "quite frantic" to stop "Star Wars" and the further pressures it would put on their economy.

He added, "I happen to think it's in our interests also" not to be faced with the kind of (nuclear) force the Soviets will build to penetrate a 'Star Wars.' "

The final speaker was co-chair Margot Kidder, who said, "I know nothing of the complex art of war and I know nothing of the even more complex art of preventing war. . . . That's why I'm here."

Women have been silent for too long in the face of a blind nationalism that has polarized nations and, Kidder said, and it is time for women "to take our place at the world's head table."

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